

at modern theatre history and serves as a provocative model for historical research.

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*Visual Habits: Nuns, Feminism, and American Postwar Popular Culture.* Rebecca Sullivan. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005; illustrations; xi + 255 pages; ISBN 0-8020-3776-3; \$29.95 (paper).

At least fifteen films featuring nuns were released in America in the 1950s and 60s; a remarkable nine were under production in 1966 alone. How is it that a time known best for its social turbulence and flouting of conventional sexual and religious mores apparently also had a fascination with the lives of celibate, cloistered, and presumably conservative women? Rebecca Sullivan's superb, groundbreaking volume explores this question in detail. Sullivan persuasively argues that nuns provided a site for exploration and negotiation of the tensions arising out of postwar culture's shift of emphasis towards individualism, coupled with a gender regime of mandatory domesticity for women. Nuns offered a "third way" between the sexually liberated "swinging single" and the "domestic goddess," in an ironic admixture of independence (from men) and submission (in the institution). As Sullivan puts it, "nuns were a third option that fired up dreams of feminine independence while smothering any possibility that the flames might spread out of control" (12). Throughout her discussion of how nuns figured in popular culture sites such as film, folk music and television, Sullivan also offers a sustained critique of both feminist analyses that dismiss religion as irrelevant and/or impose an unexamined view of "liberated" sexuality as a self-evident appropriate cultural norm. Her subtle, complex, brilliant and original text sets a new standard for the analysis of "discourses and doctrines of

femininity and how they are applied not just to women but to places, practices and objects" (216). Eminently readable, and highly recommended.

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*Literary Sisterhoods: Imagining Women Artists.* Deborah Heller. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005; illustrations; xiii + 182 pages; ISBN 0-7735-2909-8; \$27.95 (paper).

In *Literary Sisterhoods: Imagining Women Artists*, Deborah Heller casts her eye over five authors writing across Europe and North America, from the start of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth: Germaine de Staël, George Eliot, Anna Banti, Alice Munro, and Grace Paley. By juxtaposing their fiction, Heller aims to chart a feminist "genealogy of the figure of the woman artist" (3). Combining close readings with biographical and cultural analyses, she explores the affinities and contrasts between her authors, the authors and their fictional artists, and the artist figures and other characters in the texts.

As Heller suggests, these relationships are striking, worthy of critical pursuit. She highlights the dialogues her central authors took up with each other and with authors whose works figure more tacitly in the study. Heller opens the chapter on Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* with Eliot's assessment of Staël as "a woman of great intellectual power" and references to Staël's *Corinne* in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*; she notes Staël's influence on George Sand and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who were in turn "enormously admired" by Eliot (37). Heller effectively turns our attention to the rich and diverse ways her authors develop their characters, and how their characters engage with each other: she considers, for example, Banti's mix of fiction, biography, and history in